

Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Jill Baker and I am the Education Director for Planned Parenthood of Montana. I am a 4th generation Montanan and graduated from the University of Montana with a bachelor's degree in Health Promotion and a minor in Human and Family Development. I have been working in public health for the past 17 years. I am also the parent of two children who are both in elementary school. As a parent, I have served as president of the PTA at my children's school. I am here today because I care about our youth and their families.

Sexuality education is a topic that is important to me for several reasons. I grew up in a small rural community and personally have seen the effects of not having sex education in the schools or at home, both with family and friends. Knowledge is power and makes a world of difference for young people in becoming sexually healthy and responsible adults. Currently in Montana, nearly 50% of high school teens are sexually active and 2 in 10 young women become pregnant before the age of 20. Teens need reliable information to make healthy decisions to delay parenthood until they are ready and to prevent sexually transmitted infection.

Because our organization is clearly targeted in this bill, I think it is important for us to clarify the educational services that we provide in our communities to schools and parents. Planned Parenthood supports parents as their children's primary sexuality educators. As a result, our educators provide resources and workshops for parents to help them begin the often challenging discussions around human sexuality. Resources may include brochures, books, and articles. One such resource is the book that has been passed around the Capitol called *It's Perfectly Normal* by Robie Harris. Experts in sex education agree that this book deals with the subject of sexuality honestly, accurately, and age-appropriately. There is also consensus about the book's value beyond the sex education community. The book has been lauded by child development experts, including Dr. Penelope Leach (author of *Your Baby and Child and Children First*) and *Child Magazine*, and it has received awards from at least 10 distinguished publications, including *Publisher's Weekly* and *School Library Journal* (both named it "Best Book of the Year"), the *American Library Association* and the *New York Times*

(both named it "Notable Book of the Year"), and the *San Francisco Chronicle* (listed among "The Century's Best Children's Books"). This book is used as a tool for parents, not as a school curriculum. As with any children's book, parents should choose wisely to be certain that the book embodies their values and their comfort level in talking about the subject of sex.

Planned Parenthood educators are trained to be experts in the field of sexuality education and reproductive health. We provide factual, medically accurate information in a non-judgmental, unbiased way including information about STDs, birth control, relationships, and pregnancy options. It is important for youth to have an opportunity to explore their own values and feelings about these deeply personal issues without bias. When we are asked questions about controversial subjects, we divert to value question protocol in which we acknowledge that there are a variety of opinions on the issue, state any factual information that is necessary, and then invite students to further discuss the topic with their parents and/or pastor.

Planned Parenthood's relationship with schools in Montana varies by community. Currently, we provide presentations in high schools and occasionally in middle schools. We do not provide any classroom presentations in elementary schools. Topics for high school students include an overview of birth control methods and emphasize abstinence as the only 100% way to prevent pregnancy and STDs. In addition, we have also been invited into classrooms to talk about sexually transmitted infections, the consequences of teen pregnancy, and healthy relationships. In all cases, our message is about prevention. In fact, 97% of the health care services that Planned Parenthood provides are preventative services including breast and cervical cancer screenings, HIV and other STD testing, birth control and other life saving services. We are invited in by teachers to their classrooms because we are the experts in reproductive health and teen pregnancy prevention. Much like ER Doctors are experts in injury prevention, our role in providing reproductive healthcare and services provides us with a unique perspective on how to prevent unintended pregnancies and STDs. As public health professionals and educators, we follow state laws regarding the mandatory reporting of

child abuse as well as local school guidelines regarding what we can and cannot discuss in the classroom and respect the parameters set by local school boards.

PPMT provides a valuable community resource to schools by offering our content expertise on the topics of teen pregnancy and STD prevention for no additional cost to our schools. Please vote no on this bill.